

Police Superintendents' Association speech 2021

I am delighted to join your conference this year, but want to apologise that it has to be by video link. With Parliament in session during your conference, I am required to be in London for crucial votes on government business.

Last year, I thanked you for the superb work you and all of policing had done during the COVID pandemic.

Throughout the pandemic, as we know, changes to guidance and COVID restrictions created difficult situations.

You did not flinch.

Thank you for continuing to do your exceptionally challenging jobs in these exceptionally difficult times.

This is also a moment to pay tribute to all those officers who have fallen in the line of duty. In July, I, like many of you, visited the National Memorial Arboretum, which was intensely moving and poignant. It was a reminder to us all and to the public of the ultimate sacrifice that has been made by so many colleagues during their policing career, as they sought to keep the public safe.

Police pay

I want to address the question of police pay.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was very clear at the last Spending Review that the significant economic impact of COVID-19 forced the government to take very difficult decisions.

The pandemic deepened the disparity between public and private sector wages.

Many private sector workers lost their jobs, were furloughed, or saw their hours and wages seriously reduced.

This meant the Chancellor could not justify an across-the-board pay increase for public sector workers.

He asked the advice of the pay review bodies...

...proposing to raise pay in the NHS but pause pay rises elsewhere in order to protect jobs.

However, workers below the median wage – including police officers – did receive a rise. Fire and rescue service pay is negotiated through the independent National Joint Council. The government has no statutory role in

determining the pay of firefighters.

Central government likewise has no role in local authority staff pay.

This pandemic is something we have never experienced before – a truly seismic event which has affected many sectors and employers across the entire economy.

It has meant even tougher choices than usual. None of us wanted to be in this situation.

This is obviously a matter for the PSA [Police Superintendents' Association], but I would urge you to ensure that your members' voices are heard by the PRRB [Police Remuneration Review Body] for the next round.

Police pensions

Likewise on pensions, we seek a workable solution that is fair to public sector workers and fair to taxpayers.

I know the PSA attended an engagement session with the Treasury on the recently introduced Pensions Bill this month, as well as one with the Home Office in August.

We want to work with you as government finds a way through.

Diversity in policing

On diversity in policing, we are supporting police forces with a variety of recruitment strategies, whilst delivering a national campaign designed to reach diverse audiences.

In every discussion on this important issue, I have always stated that diversity is not just an issue when it comes to recruitment.

Paul and the National Policing Board know that I have set the bar high on the issue of retention and career progression – key areas of people investment that have been overlooked for too long.

This year, the College of Policing will plan and design a new Fast Track Inspector to Superintendent programme.

This is very welcome, as is the PSA's 'Future Supers' coaching and mentoring programme with the College. I am delighted that over 300 ethnic minority inspectors, chief inspectors, and police staff equivalents have signed up.

The Beating Crime Plan

On our fundamental joint task of driving down crime, we have made progress, but there is more to do.

Of course, COVID restrictions had the effect of suppressing some crimes, but

the latest crime statistics for the year to March 2021 show that overall crime levels were stable.

Serious violence fell by 14 per cent.

Homicide fell by 16 per cent.

Meanwhile, neighbourhood crime had fallen by 31 per cent over the last 2 years.

In July, we published our Beating Crime Plan.

Operational decisions are for you...

...but the Prime Minister and I have set out our strategic approach for cutting crime, as a complement to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which has its second reading in the House of Lords today.

It is essential that we cut crime. Crime blights communities and destroys lives.

Our Beating Crime Plan has 3 overarching priorities:

- traditional crime, such as serious violence, homicide, and neighbourhood crime
- hidden harms
- fraud and online crime

We have introduced measures to strengthen the links between communities and policing, through the recruitment of 20,000 additional police officers by March 2023.

These efforts have helped us recruit 9,814 additional officers already.

We have also invested £70 million in the Safer Streets Fund, which will greatly help those communities hit hardest by crime.

We have made £130.5 million available this year to tackle serious violence, including murder and knife crime.

This includes:

- £30 million for the 18 areas across England and Wales worst affected by serious violence, supporting the police in identifying violence hotspots and targeting operational activity in those areas
- £35.5 million, in the same 18 areas, to develop violence reduction units
- £20 million for new early intervention programmes to help stop young people from being drawn into violence

Drugs are not only a scourge in their own right, but a major driver of crime.

That's why the government has invested £59 million in Project ADDER up to March 2023.

This project lets us work with forces to test a systematic approach to tackling drugs that balances enforcement with diversion, treatment, and recovery.

We have also invested heavily in tackling the drugs supply and tackling county lines gangs.

Since launching in November 2019, the County Lines Programme has resulted in the closure of more than 1,100 lines...

...over 6,300 arrests, over £2.9 million in cash and significant quantities of drugs seized...

...and more than 1,900 vulnerable people safeguarded.

The Beating Crime Plan also outlines our strategies for other crimes, such as those that involve hidden harms.

Crimes like domestic abuse, rape, modern slavery, and child sexual abuse are not always as visible as others, but they have a devastating impact.

We are building capacity and capability around fraud, cyber-crime, and other forms of online harm that blight people's lives.

The Beating Crime Plan also sets out our firm commitment to tackle economic crime, particularly fraud and cyber-crime.

We are publishing a Fraud Action Plan, further hardening the UK's defences against fraudsters, and replacing Action Fraud with an improved national fraud and cyber-crime reporting system.

Our network of regional organised crime units include cyber-crime and Darkweb units. They are now up and running and provide access to specialist capabilities.

At a local level, we have established specialist cyber-crime units in every local police force in England and Wales.

We are also providing policing with the cyber skills and training needed through the Cyber Digital Career Pathway, delivered at the College of Policing.

We will continue to support and develop capacity in the Law Enforcement Cyber Crime Network. I want us to evolve it from reactive to more proactive.

And we are developing a campaign to confront the growing threat of ransomware and disrupt cyber criminals based overseas.

Meanwhile, antisocial behaviour and crime exist on a continuum and the first often leads to the latter.

There are a range of flexible tools and powers available to the police and other local agencies to tackle antisocial behaviour and we are working with

local areas to ensure they are being used effectively.

We are going to work even harder with police officers and police and crime commissioners to address antisocial behaviour, often employing local solutions.

We are acutely aware of the dangers of adding to your burden, but all public organisations need to be fully accountable to the public.

Elected politicians – and I know this is overwhelmingly true of police officers too – frequently hear concerns from the public about response times.

That's why the Beating Crime Plan includes a commitment to develop league tables for response times to 101 and 999 calls.

I want to work very closely with you and will support you on the implementation of the Beating Crime Plan in operational settings.

Police powers

A critical element to beating crime is ensuring the police have all the powers they need to do their jobs. Senior officers agree that stop and search is crucial.

We piloted relaxations to voluntary conditions on Section 60 stop and search, empowering 9,000 more officers to authorise its use.

We gathered the views of police officers and community scrutiny leaders throughout this process.

We found that police officers felt more confident using Section 60 – and that these relaxations better reflected the operational reality of policing. Consequently, the Beating Crime Plan made the relaxations permanent.

Plymouth and firearms licensing

A month ago, we saw the tragic and terrible shootings in Plymouth. Once again, we have been devastated by a senseless, appalling crime, and families have been left heartbroken.

My visit to Plymouth was shattering, but it was hugely reassuring to talk to police officers there. They were doing an extremely professional job in deeply distressing circumstances.

Events like this are rare, but that is no consolation to those affected – and their impact is felt throughout the country.

I have asked police forces in England, Scotland, and Wales urgently to review firearms licensing practices.

In particular, I have asked for a full review of all certificates that have been seized, refused, revoked, or surrendered in the past 12 months and then

subsequently approved by the police.

The Home Office is bringing forward new statutory guidance to improve how people applying for a firearms licence are assessed in future, with greater consistency and improved standards.

Nobody will be given a firearms licence unless their doctor has confirmed to the police that they don't have any relevant medical conditions, including in relation to their mental health.

The new guidance will also make explicit that firearms applicants may be subject to social media checks.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct is also looking at the issues around the granting of firearms licences to those involved.

As all this is work which is ongoing, I won't comment further, but clearly it is vital that we do all we reasonably can to prevent further tragedies like we saw in Plymouth.

The public need to know that all necessary checks have been made to help keep them safe.

The Police Covenant and wider police wellbeing

It is also important that we never lose sight of the human side of policing.

It's right to set priorities and frame strategies, and to use technology and data in a skilful way.

Ultimately, though, policing is delivered by people.

It matters that the police force is representative. It's also why we need to think so hard about welfare.

Police officers have faced all the same pressures as the rest of us throughout the pandemic, on top of having an even harder job than normal.

Policing is difficult and ferociously demanding. And leadership roles like yours bring additional pressures.

The Police Covenant was long overdue, and I am very grateful to the Police Superintendents' Association for all you have done to champion and support the development of the covenant.

The covenant will include a focus on occupational health standards and mental health training. We are also looking at options with the National Police Wellbeing Service for appointing a new Chief Medical Officer for Policing in England and Wales.

The Front Line Review clearly revealed your frustrations about unnecessary demands getting in the way of core policing...

...including internally generated demands such as disproportionate administration, overly bureaucratic processes, ineffective IT, and difficulties in sharing best practice and learning.

The development of the Police Covenant will draw on evidence from the Front Line Review. Addressing organisational issues is a major priority.

Conclusion

It has been a privilege to join your conference today. I value my interactions with policing – and my support for your work and policing is resolute.

Each of you across the Police Superintendents' Association has a central role to play, as we pursue our shared mission to keep this country safe. Thank you for all you do.